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IDOLS ARE A DANGEROUS THING

By Lynn Stuter
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NewsWithViews.com

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With the passing of Rosa Parks, the news has been filled with the idolatry of this tiny person, to see her standing beside others, who, one day, decided she had had enough of being discriminated against by white people and decided to rebel.

This is the picture of spontaneous rebellion painted of this little woman who now lies in estate, the first woman ever, in our nation's capital, eulogized by the likes of Condoleezza Rice as her hero and mentor.

But is this the real picture or is this just the picture painted for us by the media? Let's take a look. The following is from an article found in the San Jose Mercury, January 16, 2000, which states, in part:

"Before refusing to give up her bus seat, Parks had spent 12 years helping lead the local NAACP chapter, along with union activist E.D. Minon, from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, teachers from the local Negro college and a variety of ordinary members of

... A detailed communist plot to use Commonwealth College (later Highlander Folk School) as an instrument of communist propaganda, was outlined in a secret report on communism reprinted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities

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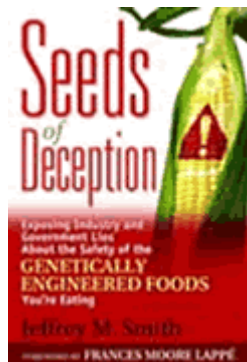
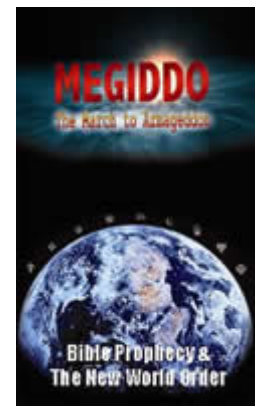
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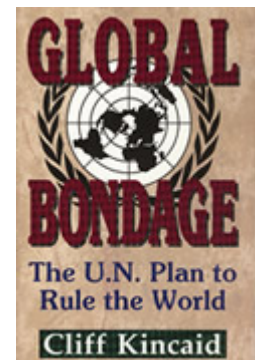
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Montgomery's African -American community.

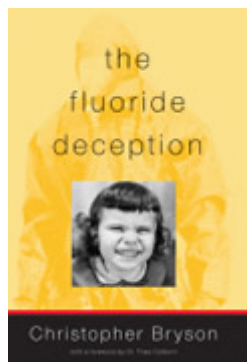
"The summer before, (her famous action on a bus) Parks had attended a 10 day training session at Tennessee's labor and civil rights organizing school, the Highlander Center, where she'd met an older generation of civil rights activists and discussed the Supreme Court decision banning 'separate but equal schools'..... In short, Parks didn't make a spur-of-the-moment decision. Rosa Parks didn't single-handedly give birth to the civil rights efforts..... In contemporary myth, Parks decides to act almost on a whim; she's a virgin to politics, a holy innocent for whom an inspired moment suddenly arrived. Parks' real story conveys a far more empowering moral. She begins with seemingly modest steps. She goes to a meeting and then another.....Had she and other given up after her 10th or 11th year of commitment, we might never have heard of Montgomery....."



Oh dear, this isn't quite the picture being so carefully painted for us by the media today, is it? Is this really true? Let's take a trip to the [Highlander Research and Education Center](#), aka, the Highlander Folk School, see what this organizing school, if it really is, is all about. The following is from the Highlander Center website:

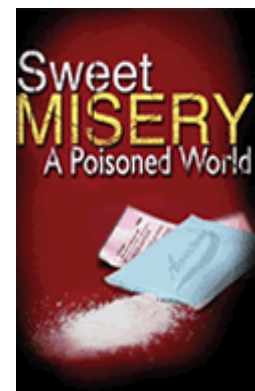


There comes a moment, a turn, when people stop thinking about what has happened to them, and start thinking about what they can make happen.



This old truism of community organizing stands, as well as anything, for the principles that underlie the 60-year-old Highlander Center, which, to the extent that such a complex program can be boiled down to a single sentence, serves as a school for grassroots community organizers in the Appalachian and Southern states.

Founded in 1932 by Myles Horton and a group of supporters as the Highlander Folk School, a "school for adults," where people of like spirit could meet, share their experiences and learn from each other,



the center has continued with essentially little change in its basic principles.

Such famous organizers as Martin Luther King came there (earning the school some notoriety among local segregationists, who considered the institution "communistic"); so did Rosa Parks, who contrary to the myth that her leadership of the Montgomery, Ala., bus strike was merely the act of a tired woman who would not be moved, was trained here before the strike. And, in more modern times, many well-known Appalachian organizers, like Becky Simpson of the Cranks Creek Survival Center, have won fellowships here to share and to learn.



Horton organized Highlander, then in the town of Monteagle, Tenn., originally to train Southern union organizers. Its primary focus moved to desegregation in the '50s, and the resulting controversy inspired state officials to take legal action to yank its charter as a school in 1960. Unbowed, Horton moved the institution to Knoxville's inner city, and then, about two decades ago, to its current setting on 110 beautiful acres of hilltop meadow with a view of the Great Smoky Mountains, about 20 miles out into the countryside east of Knoxville.

A search on Myles Horton turns up the following:

The Highlander Center in Tennessee was started in 1932 by Myles Horton and James Dombrowski, both members of the Communist Party. According to a book, 'Speak Now', a left-wing history of the civil rights movement, the original purpose was to train communist activists on how to promote textile strikes, hold protest marches, picket lines and learn 'socialist songs'. The Textile Workers Union was completely controlled by the Communist Party.....'Speak Now', says that Parks attended summer training at the Highlander Folk School in 1955, 1956 and 1957. She is pictured with Martin Luther King sitting on the front row in a Highlander training class on September 2, 1957. [source: Christian News; May 14, 2001; letter of Ed Toner, New Jersey]

In the book, Martin Luther King, The Man Behind the Myth, (Des Griffin, Emmisary Publications; Clackamas, Oregon) the following is written (page 14, 15 and 16):

Mrs. Parks had been well prepared for her adventure by a recent educational experience that included a course at an institution called Highlander Folk School, in Monteagle, Tennessee.

. . . Highlander Folk School was opened in 1954 [note this date differs here from other sources. I do not know whether it is a typo or error here or whether the school may have existed elsewhere or by another name prior to that] by Myles Horton and Dr. James A Dombrowski. These two fine, upstanding gentlemen had, just months earlier, been run out of Mena, Arkansas, for running a communist front called Commonwealth College. The college was convicted under the laws of Arkansas of displaying the hammer and sickle and openly teaching communism. The state levied a \$2,500 fine. When the college couldn't pay the fine, the state took over the property, sold it at public auction and used the money to cover the costs.

. . . A detailed communist plot to use Commonwealth College (later Highlander Folk School) as an instrument of communist propaganda, was outlined in a secret report on communism reprinted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. On April 27, 1947, the U.S. Attorney General cited Commonwealth College as a communist front (New York Times, April 28, 1949)

And what is available to teachers in classroom regarding Rosa Parks? What about the following, taken from the Highlander Folk School website:

Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks

"You Can't Padlock the Ideas": The Highlander Folk School

A pivotal episode in Rosa Parks' life was her two-week stay at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee.

While the school initially focused on justice for workers in the South, racial segregation became the pervading issue for the school for several decades beginning in the early 1940s.

Many civil rights activists passed through Highlander's grounds, including Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael.

Mrs. Parks attended Highlander only months before she stood up to segregation on a Montgomery bus in December 1955. It was at Highlander where she learned about nonviolent protest and the teachings of Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi.

Now located in New Market, Tenn., the school is still training activists from all over the world, but their current focus is on poverty in Appalachia.

ACTIVITY

1. Compile a more detailed history of Highlander by visiting the school's website. Create handouts for the classroom.
2. After students have read about Highlander's history, ask the following questions.

What was the initial purpose of the Highlander Folk School?

How did the school become involved with the Civil Rights Movement? What philosophies did the school advocate that were embraced by civil rights leaders?

When did Rosa Parks attend the Highlander School and what was she involved in that inspired her to attend? How did Mrs. Parks utilize her Highlander School training? How does the fact that she was a trained activist dispel the common perception that she was a tired, working woman who just wanted to sit down?



What was Highlander accused of in the 1950's that brought them so much negative press? Why was this such a negative label? What was the result of the attack? Besides training activists for the Civil Rights Movement, what other types of activist campaigns did the Highlander School support and train leaders for? What are issues that are currently of concern to the Highlander School? If you could attend a school that would help you fight for an issue that you feel strongly about, what would that issue be? What would you want to learn from such a school?

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All of this speaks for itself. We should be careful who we put on pedestals.

1/2 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep1/2s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.1/2 --Matthew 7:15

1/2 Thou shall have no other gods before Me.1/2 -- Exodus 20:3 (Ten Commandments)

I wish to give thanks to Mary Thompson, trusted friend, for her major contribution to this article.

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Mother and wife, Stuter has spent the past ten years researching systems theory with a particular emphasis on education. She home schooled two daughters, now grown and on their own. She has worked with legislators, both state and federal, on issues pertaining to systems governance and education reform. She networks nationwide with other researchers and citizens concerned with the transformation of our nation. She has traveled the United States and lived overseas. Web site: www.learn-usa.com E-Mail: lmstuter@learn-usa.com1/2

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